

Eternally yours but let's not go crazy

On a tight
budget yet
yearning for
a romantic
interlude?
Relax —
love is
grand, but
it doesn't
have to cost
that much

When it comes to romance, it's not the price that matters, it's the sentiment. As the Beatles sing, "All you need is love." Right? Not! The more cliches you can jam into this holiday the better: chocolates, flowers, a candlelight dinner, music. But if your budget is tight, don't despair. Following are some ideas sure to keep the sparks in your relationship.

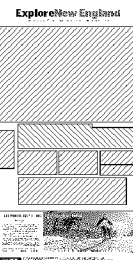
Is your love on thin ice?

Take your sweetie skating on **Frog Pond** at Boston Common, the city's grandest park. The outdoor ice rink, steps from the gold-domed State House, is surrounded by captivating skyline views. On winter days and starry nights, giggling beginners on blades wobble alongside pairs gliding effortlessly. Non-skaters can sip cappuccino or hot chocolate on a bench, enjoy the scene, and imagine living in a nearby luxury condo or Back Bay brownstone.

Daily through March 17, weather permitting (call ahead to check). Monday 10 a.m.-5 p.m.; Sunday, Tuesday-Thursday till 9; Friday-Saturday till 10; ages 14 and older \$4, 13 and under free; skate rental \$8 (13 and under \$5), lockers \$1. Snack bar open daily. Parking: Boston Common Garage. Public transportation: Green Line or Red Line to Park Street; the rink is a five-minute walk. 617-635-2120. bostoncommonfrogpond.org.

JANET MENDELSON

Say it with chocolate



Some say it with roses, but an effective entree to many a lover's heart is chocolate. Indulge in the food of the gods with brunch at **The Chocolate Bar**, in The Langham Hotel's Café Fleuri. Served Saturdays through

BUDGET ROMANCE, Page M10

June, the chocoholic's dream come true offers more than 125 choices, from chocolate soup to chocolate-covered nuts. This year's "Air, Fire, Water & Earth" theme is a sensual experience, with the intoxicating aroma of chocolate perfuming the air and shades of brown, from inky dark to creamy milk, coloring the buffet tables. Arrive hungry and pace yourself. Sample the familiar, such as chocolate chip cookies and chocolate fondue, and the more unique, chocolate spring rolls, chocolate fried risotto balls, even chocolate goat cheese sandwiches. In between, sip on what might be the world's best hot chocolate, or give a nod to health with a glass of merlot. If you must, bring a rose.

The Langham Hotel, 250 Franklin St., 617-451-1900, boston.langhamhotels.com; Saturdays, noon to 3 through June; adults \$35, children ages 5-12 \$17.50; reservations recommended.

HILARY NANGLE

One if by candlelight

The special Valentine's Day menu at **Concord's Colonial Inn** is affordable as well as elegant. In this historic inn on Monument Square, once briefly home to Henry David Thoreau, an intimate dining room sets the mood for love with white tablecloths, candles, flowers, a strolling violinist, and chocolate truffles. After dinner, linger with a cocktail at the sitting room fireplace, or visit the rustic Forge Tavern to hear live jazz, blues, or folk music. All this romance can be had for the price of your food and beverages. Entrees run from \$15-\$28. It's enough to make you swoon. (That is the point, isn't it?)

48 Monument Square, Concord, 978-369-2373, concords

colonialinn.com, reservations recommended.

NECEE REGIS

Love that's fit as a fiddle

Your love will keep you warm, but to really get the blood flowing, take a hike on the 3½-mile **Cliff Walk**, Newport, R.I.'s, most famous footpath. This National Recreation Trail is a gem. It takes you across some big-name backyards, including the Vanderbilts' Breakers and the Astors' Beechwood. There's a lot of history along the trail, much of it uncovered in "A Guide to Newport's Cliff Walk: Tales of 23 of Cliff Walk's 'Cottages,' Their Families and Foibles, Their Fortunes and Architects" by Ed Morris. It's great pre- or post-walk read. So dress warm, walk, stop, look, cuddle, and fantasize about that mansion you're looking at being the love nest of your dreams.

Parking is free at the start of Cliff Walk on Memorial Boulevard, Newport, R.I., or in the lot of nearby Easton's Beach. For more information, including maps, visit cliffwalk.com.

PAUL E. KANDARIAN

Far-out Cape solitude

Provincetown is its most romantic in winter. The lights in the upper-story windows of many old houses offer a sense of mystery, of lives lived just out of sight. The best deal around: a midweek stay at the **Aerie House & Beach Club**. The guesthouse sits high on a hill with commanding views of the

town and harbor. There's Wi-Fi, in-room phones, TVs and DVD players, coffeemakers and refrigerators, and some have gas fireplaces and other amenities. Did I mention the wood-burning fireplace or the outdoor hot tub for frigid nights under the stars? If you want more privacy and more space, they also have one-bedroom apartments right on the water. Rooms go for as little as \$35 a night, the apartments for \$90.

Page 2 of 6

And if your idea of romance includes snuggling with your dog, an extra \$10 a night lets Fido in, too.

184 Bradford St., Provincetown, 800-487-1197, 508-487-1197, aeriehouse.com. Weekday special \$35-\$100 a night, weekends \$60-\$170.

KATHY SHORR

A Maine event

Most Maine lobster shacks are breezy, casual shanties where patrons enjoy fresh seafood, boiled or fried, on picnic tables by the water's edge. But when summer ends, they close. **Cook's Lobster House**, on Bailey Island in Harpswell, is one of the few that stays open year-round. To lure customers on cold winter nights, it undergoes a romantic makeover. A wood-burning stove warms the dining room and staff in black-and-white attire offer dramatic tableside service, along with the regular menu and an unusually good wine list. As the moon rises over Casco Bay, you can sample the Caesar salad, made while you watch, a haddock sandwich (the local specialty), and bananas Foster, flambeed with style. Add a nice bottle of wine and the bill will still be less than \$100, including tax and tip.

Garrison Cove Road, off Route 24, Bailey Island, Maine, 207-833-2818, cookslobster.com. Tableside service for two: Caesar salad \$13.95, chateaubriand \$59.95 (call one day ahead), seafood cioppino \$52.95, bananas Foster or crème brûlée \$13.95.

JUDITH GAINES

Island retreat

For a romantic adventure that's more unpredictable and spontaneous than a candlelight dinner, consider an island escape — to **Nantucket**. Dress warm for a day exploring the charming old whaling town. For coffee and other goodies, The Bean is home to Nantucket Coffee Roasters. The Even Keel Cafe ends its winter break on

Valentine's Day. Among other lunch options with creative fare are Centre Street Bistro and Fog Island Cafe. Mitchell's Book Corner and Nantucket Bookworks are resources for local books while the Artists Association of Nantucket presents "The Art Colony and the Sea: New and Historical Maritime Art on Nantucket," 60 works from its collection. Love without chocolate is a no-no, so stop for a treat at the Nantucket Chocolatier's Sweet Inspirations Chocolate Workshop.

Steamship Authority, South Street dock, Hyannis, 508-477-8600, steamshipauthority.com. One way \$15, round trip \$30. First ferry leaves at 9:15 a.m., arrives at 11:30 a.m.; last return ferry at 5:30 p.m.

JAN SHEPHERD

Putting a label on love

Nothing says I love you like a personalized brew or Valentine vinification. You and your honey can make your own beer, wine, or soda pop at **IncrediBREW** in Nashua. And that means designing your own sweet-nothings label that can even include a portrait of the two of you. The establishment provides recipes, ingredients, and guidance to brew beer or make wine or root beer. And they do the cleanup. Root beer costs \$40 for 48 bottles. You can brew beer for as low as \$30 a case during special promotions and \$110-\$130 for 13 gallons, depending on the type. Wine is more expensive but arguably more romantic. You can pay as little as \$70 for 10 bottles of custom-made Shiraz to \$130-\$180 for 30 bottles of a variety of wines.

112 Daniel Webster Highway, Nashua, 603-891-2477, incredibrew.com.

TOM LONG

Sleigh bells call the tune

Along the river and through the woods you can go on a charming Victorian-style horse-drawn sleigh ride. Sit side-by-side or face-to-face, warmed by red snowflake

fleece blankets. Two sturdy Belgian draft horses lead the open sleigh from **The Farm by the River Bed & Breakfast with Stables** in North Conway, N.H., through old apple orchards, along the chilled Saco River, and past snowy mountain ranges. Start and finish the idyllic affair with hot chocolate by the fire in the cozy circa 1785 farmhouse. Though it pales in comparison with the company, gaze together at the Mount Washington Valley's alpine splendor.

2555 West Side Road, North Conway, N.H., 888-414-8353, farmbytheriver.com. \$85 couple; February \$99 special includes champagne or sparkling cider plus chocolates.

MARTY BASCH

Draw on your affections

You love each other. It's Valentine's Day. Why not make it permanent? Permanent ink, that is. How about a heart with an arrow through it or one with your lover's name? At **Precision Body Arts**, an upscale tattoo emporium and art gallery in downtown Nashua, you can do it with class. A pair of matching heart tattoos — one for you, one for your sweetheart — will set you back \$100. Need a little bracing beforehand or painkiller after? Have a Sapporo beer and some kappa maki at Jasmine Palace next door or a glass of pinot noir and a calamari fritti appetizer two doors down at Del Vaudo's, a fine dining Italian restaurant and lounge.

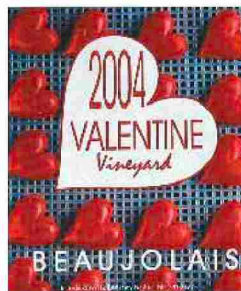
116 West Pearl St., Nashua, 603-889-5788, precisionbodyarts.com. Reservations suggested, but walk-ins welcome.

TOM LONG

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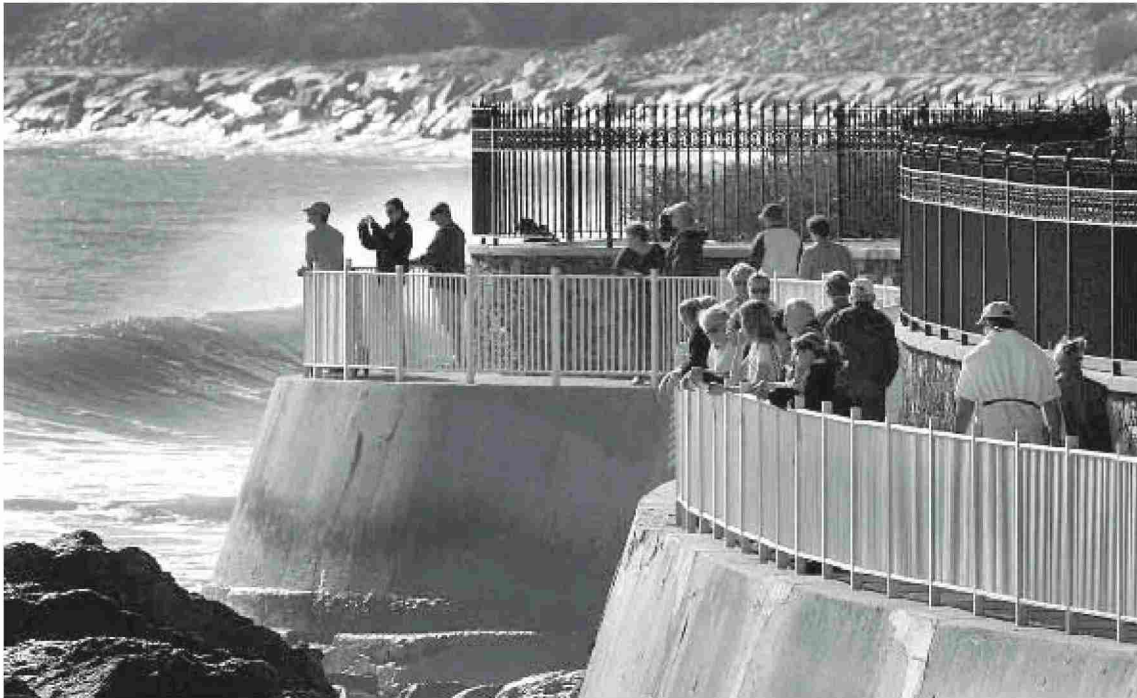


DAVID KAMERMAN/GLOBE STAFF/FILE



Trumpet your sweet nothings with matching heart tattoos from Precision Body Arts or design a label for your own beer, wine, or soda pop at IncrediBREW. Strawberries dipped in chocolate from The Langham Hotel's Café Fleuri couldn't hurt, either.

PHOTOS BY TOM LONG/FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE
(FAR LEFT AND RIGHT)



JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

Take a hike and fantasize about your own love nest along the 3½-mile Cliff Walk in Newport, R.I.



BILL GREENE/GLOBE STAFF/FILE

**Don't miss Brant Point Light
while exploring romantic
Nantucket.**



Try a Victorian-style horse-drawn sleigh ride at The Farm by the River Bed & Breakfast with Stables in North Conway, N.H.



TOM THEL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

Staff in black-and-white attire offer dramatic tableside service by night at Cook's Lobster House in Harpswell, Maine.